



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Eastern
Region



Revised Project Proposal for the Pine Ridge Project Area

***POPLAR BLUFF RANGER DISTRICT,
Mark Twain National Forest***



A healthy forest maintained by prescribed fire

Content

Document Structure	1
Project Background and Location	1
Purpose and Need for Action	2
Proposed Action.....	4
Decision Framework	13
Public Involvement.....	14

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Document Structure

The Forest Service has prepared this proposal in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Forest Service regulations for notice, comment and appeal of projects (36 CFR 215) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This document provides the basis for obtaining substantive comments on a revised project proposal for an area located on the Poplar Bluff Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest under the revised NEPA regulations that took effect in June 2003. The document is organized into five parts:

- **Background:** The section includes information on the history of the project proposal.
- **Purpose and Need:** This section provides a rationale for the proposal, focusing on its relationship to the goals and objectives contained in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Mark Twain National Forest.
- **Proposed Action:** This section describes the elements of the revised proposal organized by activity (for example, prescribed burning, Old Growth designation, etc.). The focus of the descriptions is on activities that may have environmental effects, to facilitate identification of issues regarding the environmental effects, identification of alternatives to the proposed action, and to facilitate identification of potentially significant environmental effects.
- **Decision Framework:** This section describes how the Responsible Official will review the revised proposed action in arriving at a decision, and describes the nature of the decision to be made.
- **Public Involvement:** This section provides more detailed information on how the proposal was developed and then revised, how the public can most effectively comment on the proposal, and how those comments will be considered in arriving at a decision.

Additional information, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be obtained from Bill Paxton, Integrated Resource Analyst, or Sueanne Cmeheil-Warn, GIS Specialist, at (573) 785-1475, or (573) 785-0267 (FAX), or in person at the Poplar Bluff Ranger District, 1420 Maud Street, P.O. Poplar Bluff, MO 63901. The proposed action should also be available after August 22, 2004 on the Mark Twain National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/publications.htm>.

Project Background and Location

Background

The general project area was previously known as the Pleasant Valley Project. A 1998 decision for that project was not implemented, and subsequently withdrawn in 2001. In August 2003, a revised project proposal was sent out for 30-day legal comment. This project proposal was considered a new project because of the time period (five years) that had passed since the original proposal in 1998.

A decision by the Poplar Bluff District Ranger was pending on the August 2003 proposal when a maternity colony of Indian bats was discovered by scientific researchers in Compartment 29 in May 2004. The Pine Ridge environmental analysis process was subsequently suspended until the discovery of the Indiana bat was addressed.

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Following public involvement, an Area of Influence (AOI) was established for the Indiana bat on August 13, 2004 in a decision by Mark Twain National Forest Supervisor Ronnie Raum. The AOI is composed of two (2) compartments totaling over 2,180 acres which were part of the proposed action sent out for public review and comment in August 2003. Designation of compartments 28 and 29, respectively, as the AOI required amending the Mark Twain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). These two compartments were re-classified from a 4.1 Management Area (MA) classification, to a 3.5 MA classification. A 3.5 MA provides special designation, protection, and management for the Indiana bat. More information regarding this re-classification can be found on the Mark Twain National Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/projects/40405/index.htm.

The remainder of the compartments in the Pine Ridge proposal sent out for public involvement in August 2003 – those compartments other than 28 and 29 - are in non-compliance with the Mark Twain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). The Purpose and Need for Action for those compartments remains viable. Thus, this proposal was developed to address resource management needs in the remaining landscape area.

Location

The project area is located in Management Area 4.14 on the Poplar Bluff Ranger District of the Mark Twain National Forest. Land management decisions in MA 4.14 emphasize the management of short-leaf pine in its natural range on sites where it is recognized as a dominant or characteristic member of the natural community.

The Pine Ridge Project area is located in Wayne County, Missouri, within Township 27N Range 5E Sections 1-5, Township 27N Range 6E Sections 5 and 6, Township 28N Range 4E Sections 1 and 12, Township 28N Range 5E Sections 2-8, 11, and 16-36, Township 27N Range 6E Sections 30 and 31.

It is located mostly west of U.S. Highway 67, along Wayne County roads F, A, FF, and U, respectively, and south of the National Forest Boundary and east of Wayne County Road V. The nearest town is Greenville, approximately 2-1/2 miles north of the project area.

The general project area consists of 12 compartments: 18, 19, 27, 30-33, 45, 48-51, and 177, containing over 25,500 total acres. Of this total, over 12,770 acres are National Forest System managed lands, and approximately 12,760 acres are Corps of Engineers and private lands. Proposed resource management activities would occur on National Forest System lands only.

Please note that no resource management activities are proposed in Compartment 18. Also, acreages, mileages, et al, may not agree with previous public scoping documents regarding the project area. In addition, we are in the process of updating our data, and are transitioning into use of the latest Geographic Information System (GIS) data available. However, some data are only available in the older format, and are not compatible with GIS. Acreages used in this document and the Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project will reflect this information update transition phase.

Purpose and Need for Action

The 1986 Mark Twain National Forest Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended, provides general guidance and direction for the Proposed Action. The proposed activities are

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

needed to meet the general direction provided in the LRMP. Specifically, there is a need to move existing conditions in management Area 4.14 to conditions that more closely resemble the Desired Future Conditions in the Forest Plan. The emphasis in MA 4.14 is to emphasize the management of shortleaf pine in its natural range on sites where it is recognized as a dominant or characteristic member of the natural community LRMP, pages IV-125 – 131).

The Forest Plan provides general guidelines for conserving biological diversity on National Forest System lands. Vertical diversity of plants and animals are maintained by managing for natural communities in varying stages of development or vegetative age classes (LRMP, Wildlife Management Goals, Page IV-2; Management Direction Forest-wide, pages IV-49-65; and Management Prescription 4.1, pages IV-125-131). These stages, or habitat conditions, help provide a diversity of habitats and ecosystems necessary to sustain healthy populations of plants and animals in the Pine Ridge Project area.

The Forest Plan also provides general direction and guidance for restoring ecosystem health, providing improved forage and habitats for wildlife, dispersed recreation opportunities for the public, wood products for the marketplace, as well as reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire on forest resources and private lands.

The resource management activities identified within the Proposed Action are needed to meet Forest Plan guidance (LRMP, pages IV-1-85; Management Prescription 4.1, pages IV-125-131) and Opportunity Area analyses. They include:

- Reducing excessive fuel loading conditions in order to limit the possibility of catastrophic wildfires.
- Maintaining/improving forest health and diversity.
- Protect existing special forest areas (including Old Growth), unique habitats and Threatened and Endangered species.
- Addressing early successional stage habitat conditions (vegetation 0-9 years of age), not well distributed across the project area as a whole.
- Creating and maintaining an adequate amount of permanent open/semi-open land.
- Keeping open road density of the 4.14 Management Area near or below the Forest Plan standard of 2.0 miles of open road per square mile of National Forest System land, and maintaining only those roads needed for forest management purposes.
- Maintaining existing National Forest System roads to standard, and mitigating potential safety concerns.
- Maintaining Forest Plan standard of 1-2 water sources per square mile of National Forest System land.
- Providing firewood.

The Proposed Action consists of a variety of site-specific resource management activities directed toward maintaining a diverse, healthy, productive, and sustainable forest area that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs from these lands.

Proposed Action

All proposed resource management activities would be implemented on lands deemed appropriate and/or suitable for such purposes as identified in the Forest Plan for the Mark Twain National Forest (1986, available on the Internet at http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/managment/planning/forest_plan_documents_1986.htm, and that are capable of meeting the specific needs identified in this document, and in previous scoping documents, for the Project area sent out to the public in 2001 and 2003. These needs were established by comparing Current Conditions with Desired Future Conditions for the project analysis area, specific Management Area (MA 4.14) Standards and Guidelines (S&G) and general forest S&G further described in the Forest Plan.

Proposed resource management activities within the project area include:

Reducing excessive fuel loading conditions in order to limit the possibility of catastrophic wildfires and maintaining/improving forest health and diversity.

- **An estimated 1,674 acres of prescribed burning.** The Mark Twain National Forest is an ecosystem whose plants and animals have adapted to the periodic occurrence of fire (Thompson, Degraaf, and Trani, 2001; Guyette, and Dey 2000; Lorimer, 2001). One or more prescribed burns, on an as-needed basis, would be implemented over the next ten years to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire, improve general ecosystem health, create a diversity of plant species and wildlife habitat, and help create conditions conducive to natural regeneration of both pines and hardwoods. Specific compartments and stands proposed for treatments are identified in the attached spreadsheet and Prescribed Burning Map.
- **Hazardous fuel conditions would be addressed in heavy fuel accumulation areas.** An estimated 256 acres of prescribed burning treatments are proposed to address fuel-loading conditions in a total of 15 stands in four compartments (30, 31, 32, and 45). These stand areas are included in the estimated 1,674 acres above. In 2000, a wind event altered fuel accumulations (fuel loads) in these areas. These areas would be treated by prescribed burning generally as part of larger, landscape scale burns conducted for wildlife and other purposes. Specific compartments and stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet. These stands comprise an estimated 256 acres (15.3%) of the estimated 1,674-acre burning proposal.

Hazardous fuel conditions create the potential for severe forest fires that could have a significant effect on the health and safety of the public and firefighters in the area. If a wildfire were to occur, state and county roadways are at risk of receiving heavy smoke resulting in unsafe conditions for vehicles. The private property and the citizens who live near or visit the area are at risk due to this increased potential for severe wildfire. The ability to respond to and safely suppress potential fires is severely decreased by the large fuel accumulations and the physical obstacles created by the downed trees.

Multiple, periodic prescribed burning treatments on an as-needed basis over the course of the next five to ten years would significantly reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire to public and private lands and property, and the physical

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

safety of local residents, volunteer fire department firefighters, and trained wildland firefighters.

Protecting existing special areas, unique habitats, and Threatened and Endangered species.

- **An estimated 932 acres of Old Growth would be designated.** Stands designated as Old Growth stands would be allowed to grow and develop characteristics such as large diameter, old trees, with an abundance of snags, cavity and den trees, and a variety of understory plant species and structural conditions (Missouri Department of Conservation, 1986; LRMP IV-64, and Forest Service Handbook 2609.21). Proposed Old Growth stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet and Resource Management Activities Map.
- **An estimated 185 acres of permanent/semi-open land habitat would be maintained.** Proposed prescribed burning treatment stands for this habitat type is included in the 1,674 acres of prescribed burning treatments identified in the attached spreadsheet.
- **Commercial thinning on an estimated 1,037 acres of dense stands.** Commercial thinning would reduce the density of trees in overstocked or densely stocked stands of pine and improve overall forest health. Generally these are stands 40-70 years of age. Suppressed, poorly formed, or excess trees (trees not needed to maintain full stocking) would be removed. Well-formed (healthier) trees would remain in a more open, but well-stocked, more naturally appearing forest condition. Opening up of these stands would allow increased light to reach the forest floor, allowing native grasses to re-establish themselves. Temporary openings would be created in treated stands at a rate of 1 acre of opening per 10 acres of harvest treatment, providing an additional 104 acres, more or less, of early successional stage habitat. Larger hardwoods, if present, would be retained for mast production. Proposed treatment stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet and Resource Management Activities Map.
- **Pre-commercial thinning on an estimated 1,387 acres.** Pre-commercial thinning treatment is the only treatment on these stands. Specific compartments and stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet. A pre-commercial thinning treatment utilizing handtools consists of felling of competing vegetation to reduce competition between trees in young forest stands for nutrients.
- **1,104 acres, more or less, of hand planting of native short leaf pine.** Planting (artificial regeneration) of native short leaf pine is proposed on an estimated 1,104 acres of even-aged management harvest (50 acres of Seedtree and 1,054 acres of Shelterwood) within the project area if stocking surveys reveal inadequate stocking rates. Planting would not be done if stocking surveys determine there is adequate natural regeneration. Compartments and stands are identified on the attached spreadsheet as Seedtree and Shelterwood harvest treatments.

An estimated 876 acres of Early Successional Stage habitat conditions for both non-game and game species would be created and better distributed across the project area using timber harvest. Harvest treatments would serve to reduce the risk of wildfire by reducing fuel-loading conditions, provide woodland habitat in the 0-9-age class (early

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

successional stage [ESS]), temporary forage for wildlife, and wood products for the marketplace. No clearcutting treatments are proposed. Treatment compartment and stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet and Resource Management Activities Map. In addition to the 104 acres, more or less, of Early Successional Stage habitat created during commercial thinning activities, other harvest treatments would produce Early Successional Stage habitat. Specifically:

- **Approximately 50 acres of Seedtree harvest.** Seedtree harvest is proposed in Compartment 19, Stand 24 (15 acres, 25 (20 acres, 49 (8 acres, and 51 (7 acres). Seedtree harvest would provide approximately 48 acres of ESS habitat (95% of 50 acres). This figure (95%) is used to estimate the percent of ESS created when trees removed are from a stand area in a Seedtree harvest treatment.
- **Approximately 1,054 acres of Shelterwood harvest.** Specific compartments and stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet. Shelterwood harvest would provide approximately 632 acres (60% of 1,054 acres) of ESS habitat. This figure (60%) is used to estimate the percent of Early Successional Stage created when trees removed are from a stand area in a shelterwood harvest.
- **Approximately 919 acres of uneven-aged management harvest.** Temporary openings would be created in treated stands at a rate of 1 acre of opening per 10 acres of harvest treatment, providing an additional 92 acres, more or less, of ESS habitat. New pine and hardwood regeneration in these stands would be accomplished through natural regeneration; no planting is proposed. Residual basal area would not fall below 50 square feet per acre in treated stands. Mast producing hardwoods would be retained in these stands at a minimum BA of 5-7 square feet per acre.
- **Commercial thinning on an estimated 1,037 acres of dense stands.** Commercial thinning would reduce the density of trees in overstocked or densely stocked stands of pine and improve overall forest health. Temporary openings would be created in treated stands at a rate of 1 acre of opening per 10 acres of harvest treatment, providing an additional 104 acres, more or less, of early successional stage habitat. Larger hardwoods, if present, would be retained for mast production.

An estimated 2,023 acres of site preparation for natural regeneration and other stand tending measures (Site prep and pre-commercial thinning) in even and uneven-aged harvest stands. This would involve using handtools and/or prescribed burning to establish conditions conducive to regeneration of native short leaf pine. If 2nd and 3rd year stand checks determine there is inadequate regeneration, hand planting of native pine may be required.

Reduction of open-road density in the 4.14 MA to near or below the Forest Plan standard of 2.0 miles of open road per square mile of National Forest System land.

The 4.1 Management Area road density is an estimated 1.16 miles/square mile of National Forest System land and the project area density is an estimated 1.64 miles/square mile. The Forest Plan standard is 2.0 miles/square mile. The current MA road density is within Forest Plan standards and guidelines. However, there are 63 user-developed, unclassified roads not needed for land management purposes.

- **An estimated 31 miles of unclassified, non-system road closures.** 63 unclassified, non-system roads (not on the Forest Transportation Atlas) of varying lengths totaling an

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

estimated 31 miles would be rehabilitated with native vegetation. Some are identified on topographic maps as unimproved or 4-wheel drive roads or trails. Others are user-developed roads not identified on topographic maps. They would be blocked using earthen berms, rocks, and/or gates, and closure would be preceded by the removal of illegal trash dumps that have developed alongside many of them. These roads are identified on the attached Transportation Map. They include:

Compartment 19 One segment – 0.4 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 7, NW off Forest Road 3653A	0.3 miles
---	-----------

Compartment 27 total of 9 segments – 3.35 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 7, NWSE north off County Road 376	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 7, SENE north off County Road 376	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 18 NENE west off Forest Road 3651	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 17 W1/2NW and Section 18, E1/2NE east off Forest Road 3651	0.6 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 17 W1/2NW and Section 18, E1/2NE off Forest Road 3651	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 17, NW, and N1/2SW off Forest Road 3651	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 17, NW, and N1/2SW off Forest Road 3651	0.5 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 17, SWNE, off Forest Road 3651	0.25 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 17, NW off Forest Road 3651B	0.5 miles

Compartment 30 total of 12 segments – 5.3 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 23, NESE off of Forest Road 3771	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 23, S1/2SE off of Forest	0.3 miles

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Road 3771	
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 23, S1/2SE and Section 26 NENE off of Forest Road 3771	0.4 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 23, SESW and Section 26 NW off of Forest Road 3771	0.6 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26 NE off of Forest Road 3771	0.5 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26 NE off of Forest Road 3771	0.5 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26 W1/2 off of Forest Road 3771	0.6 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26 E1/2 off of Forest Road 3771	0.4 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26, SE off of Forest Road 3771	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26, SW off of Forest Road 3771	0.5 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26, SW and Section 35 NW off of Forest Road 3771	0.5 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 26, SE, and NWNE off of Forest Road 3771	0.4 miles

Compartment 31 total of 4 segments – 1.7 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 27, NWSE, and NESW off of Forest Road 3570	0.45 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 34, N1/2NW off of Forest Road 3570	0.45 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 33, NENE and Section 28, SESE off of Forest Road 3570	0.4 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 33, NW off of Forest Road 3570	0.4 miles

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Compartment 32 total of 7 segments – 2.55 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 22, SWNW off of County Road 371	0.2 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 22, SWNW, and NWSW off of County Road 371	0.2 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 27, NWNW and Section 28 NENE off of Forest Road 3573A	0.4 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 28 NENE off of Forest Road 3573A	0.15 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 28 NW off of Forest Road 3573	0.55 miles
Unnumbered road in T28 N, R5E Section 28 on east side of Forest Road 3573	0.55 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 28 S1/2SW off of Forest Road 3122	0.55 miles

Compartment 33 total of 3 segments – 1.6 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 28 SWNW, and SWSW off of Forest Road 3573	0.55 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 29 N1/2SE, and S1/2NE off of Forest Road 3122	0.5 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 29 N1/2SE, and S1/2NE off of Forest Road 3122	0.6 miles

Compartment 45 total of 1 segment – 0.65 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 29 N1/2SE, and S1/2NE off of Forest Road 3122	0.65 miles
---	------------

Compartment 48 total of 3 segments – 1.2 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 33 SW off of Forest Road 3122	0.65 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 3 SWSE, and NENW off	0.25 miles

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

of Forest Road 3594	
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 3, SWSE, and NENW off of Forest Road 3594	0.3 miles

Compartment 49 total of 6 segments – 3.65 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 34, NESE off of Forest Road 3844	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 2, NWNW off of Forest Road 3844	0.4miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 2, W1/2NW off of Forest Road 3844	0.45 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 2 NE, and Section 1 NW, off of Forest Road 3844 and Missouri Highway 67	0.9 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 2 NE, and Section 1 NW, off of Forest Road 3844 and Missouri Highway 67	0.8 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 2 NESE, and Section 1 NWSW, off end of Forest Road 3844	0.8 miles

Compartment 50 total of 6 segments – 2.35 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 35, NWSW off of County Road F	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 35, NWSW off of Forest Road 3846	0.3 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 36 SWNW and Section 35, SE off of Forest Road 3846	0.4 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 6, N1/2SW off end of Forest Road 3846	0.4 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 6, N1/2SW off end of Forest Road 3846	0.75 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 6, N1/2SW off end of Forest Road 3846	0.2 miles

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Compartment 51 total of 4 segments – 1.65 miles

Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 35 NE, Section 36 NW, and Section 25, S1/2SW off of County Road F	0.75 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 36, NE, and Section 31 NWNW off of Forest Road 3869	0.55 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 36, SESE, and T28N, R6E, Section 31 NWNW off of County Road F	0.2 miles
Unnumbered road in T28N, R5E, Section 36, SESE	0.15 miles

Compartment 177 total of 7 segments – 6.1 miles

Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 2, SWSW and Section 3, SESE off of County Road 403	0.35 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 3, E1/2SE off of Forest Road 3843	1.1 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 3, SW off of Forest Road 3843	1.1 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 3, SW off of Forest Road 3843B	0.8 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 3, SW off of Forest Road 3843B	0.75 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 4, N1/2SE off of Forest Road 3843B	0.75 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 4, N1/2SE off of Forest Road 3843B	0.6 miles
Unnumbered road in T27N, R5E, Section 4, N1/2SE and Section 3 SW off of Forest Road 3843B	0.65 miles

An estimated 23 miles of road maintenance to 23 System road segments is needed.

Improve the condition of several National Forest System roads in the project area by providing improved drainage, brushing, grading, and spot graveling as needed. Maintenance involves repairing a road on the Forest Transportation System to meet minimum System road standards as described in the LRMP to improve safety, afford adequate access and egress, and/or correct erosion problems. These roads are identified on the attached Transportation Map.

They include:

Poplar Bluff Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Compartment 19

3063	1.0 miles		3653	1.7 miles
------	-----------	--	------	-----------

Compartment 27

3651	1.3 miles
------	-----------

Compartment 31

3897	0.5 miles
------	-----------

Compartment 32

3573	1.4 miles		3573A	0.4 miles
------	-----------	--	-------	-----------

Compartment 33

3634	1.2 miles
------	-----------

Compartment 45

3108	0.7 miles		3064	0.4 miles
------	-----------	--	------	-----------

Compartment 48

3594	1.5 miles
------	-----------

Compartment 49

3844	1.5 miles		3844A	0.6 miles
3844AB	0.5 miles		3844AC	0.9 miles

Compartment 50

3844	1.9 miles		3846	1.9 miles
3846C	0.8 miles		3846B	0.5 miles
3846BA	0.5 miles			

Compartment 51

3065	0.4 miles
------	-----------

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Compartment 177

3843	1.2 miles		3843B	1.2 miles
3845	0.8 miles			

Maintain Forest Plan standard of 1-2 water sources per square mile, including their specialized habitat.

Maintenance of 28 existing ponds approximately 1/2 to 1-acre in size. These ponds would be maintained by handcutting undesirable vegetation from the banks, and/or rebuilding dams, seeding banks, or cleaning out siltation from the ponds as needed. If any ponds would need to be rebuilt, it could involve using a dozer or trackhoe to reconstruct the pond. It could require dozing out or pulling material from the bottom of the pond to rebuild the dam. In addition it could require bring in additional fill material, such as clay, to line the pond and/or dam. Prescribed burning may be used instead of handcutting as conditions warrant as part of larger landscape scale prescribed burns. The ponds, each one acre or less in size, are identified by compartment and stand in the attached spreadsheet. Proposed treatment stands are identified in the attached spreadsheet and Resource Management Activities Map.

Construction of 4 new ponds. This would involve using a dozer or trackhoe to construct wildlife-benefiting ponds during drier periods of the year. These ponds would be approximately 1/2 to 1-acre in size, and would serve to improve water availability for both game and non-game species. Proposed pond stand locations are identified in the attached spreadsheet and Resource Management Activities Map.

Making firewood available. Firewood would be made available to those who depend on the National Forest for wood to heat their homes. Tops and cull material felled during timber harvesting operations or as part of other resource management activities, such as site prep, would be available to woodcutters after harvesting activities are complete. Access to and from these areas would be on existing System, as well as temporarily constructed roads and skid trails. No cross-country travel would be authorized.

Decision Framework

As the Responsible Official, the Poplar Bluffs District Ranger will decide some time in fall 2004 whether or not to implement the Proposed Action, a No Action alternative, or an alternative developed through consideration of substantive comments received regarding this proposal. If an action alternative is selected, the District Ranger will also decide on required mitigation and monitoring measures.

The decision to be made is not one of land allocation (for example, suitability for timber harvest, appropriate Management Area designation, etc.) The scope of the decision to be made is confined to a range of reasonable alternatives implementing the Forest Plan on the area of National Forest System land described as the area (Compartments 18, 19, 27, 30-33, 45, 48-51 and 177) within MA 4.14 of the Poplar Bluff Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest, Wayne County, Missouri. The scope is further constrained by Forest Plan Standards and

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

Guides for Management Prescription 4.1. Generally, alternatives that are in conflict with the Forest Plan will not be considered in detail unless they move the area toward the Forest Plan desired condition. In such a case, a project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan would be required.

A draft EA has been prepared that analyzes, compares, and documents the environmental impacts of three alternatives: Alternative 1 - No Action, Alternative 2 - the Proposed Action, Alternative 3 – Modified Proposed Action. Alternative 3 was developed following public involvement conducted in the period August – September 2003 and further agency review and evaluation. More action alternatives may be developed based on substantive comments that are received as a result of the current round of public involvement. Based on the analysis presented in the final EA, the District Ranger will determine whether there are significant environmental effects that require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). If an EIS is not required, the District Ranger will decide whether or not to implement the Proposed Action or an alternative course of action. The District Ranger's decision will be based on the ability of the chosen alternative to meet Forest Plan objectives while resolving environmental effects issues identified by the Interdisciplinary Team and public. If an EIS is required, the District Ranger's selection of alternative will be guided by the analysis presented in the EIS.

Public Involvement

The project was initiated in March 1996, when it was first listed on the Mark Twain National Forest "Schedule of Proposed Actions" as the "Smoot Hollow project set analysis". In January 1997, it was renamed the "Pleasant Valley project set analysis". After public involvement was completed, a decision for the Pleasant Valley Environmental Assessment was issued on June 29, 1998. Missouri Heartwood appealed the decision on August 17, 1998. The Regional Forester affirmed the decision on September 18, 1998. On October 23, 2000, Missouri Heartwood filed a lawsuit challenging the decision. The decision was withdrawn, as part of a settlement agreement, in June 2000.

In 2001, the project was renamed as the Pine Ridge Project, and the scope and extent was revised to reflect more current information. Several resource management activities were added. A new scoping package was sent out for comment on July 10, 2001 to the Poplar Bluff public involvement list. Additional public involvement was conducted in 2003. This document is a result of incorporating substantive public comments gathered during that scoping period and further agency review and evaluation since the discovery of the Indiana bat maternity colony.

This specific document is intended to provide information on the Revised Proposed Action beyond that contained in the notice of opportunity to comment required under the revised 36 CFR 215.5. Under 36 CFR 215.5, your comments are required to be substantive, that is, they are within the scope of the proposed action, specific to the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and include supporting reasons for me to consider in the EA and my subsequent decision. Substantive comments will be used to further identify the environmental effects of the Proposed Action, to define issues (points of debate, disagreement

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

or uncertainty concerning the effects of the Proposed Action), and to develop reasonable alternatives to the proposed action.

Comments on this Proposed Action must be postmarked or received within 30 days of the date the legal notice is published in the *Daily American Republic*, Poplar Bluff, Missouri. This is the “newspaper of record” for the district. The date the legal notice is published in this newspaper is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit comments on a proposed action to be analyzed and documented in an EA.

Only those who submit timely and substantive comments during this 30-day comment period will be accepted as appellants of the subsequent decision. Individuals and organizations desiring eligibility to appeal must provide the following information:

- (i) Name and physical mailing address;**
- (ii) Title of the proposed action (this proposed action is the Proposed Action: Project Area;**
- (iii) Substantive comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that I should consider in reaching a decision; and**
- (iv) Signature or other verification of identity upon request.**

Identification of the individual or organization that authored the comment(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility. Each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request.

The decision will be mailed to those who have commented on this project, and to those who request the decision. To obtain more information about this project, please contact Bill Paxton, Integrated Resource Analyst, at (573) 785-1475. Please send mail comments to: District Ranger, Poplar Bluff Ranger District, P.O. Box 988, Poplar Bluff, MO 63902. ATTN: **Proposed Action: Pine Ridge Project Area.** The District Ranger telephone number is (573) 785-1475. Send any fax comments to the District Ranger at (573) 785-0267, and submit any e-mail comments to comments-eastern-mark-twain-poplar-bluff@fs.fed.us. Please include the name of the proposed action (**Proposed Action: Pine Ridge Project Area**) in the subject line of the e-mail. Acceptable formats for electronic comments are: text or HTML e-mail, Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF), or formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications. Office hours (for those hand delivering comments by hand) are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday – Friday at 1420 Maud Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri. Oral comments must be provided at my office during normal office hours.

Summary of the Proposed Action for the Pine Ridge Project Area

REFERENCES

Forest Service Handbook 2609.21. Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Handbook, Chapter 40, 43.42.

Gardner, J.E. and E.A Cook. 2002. Seasonal and Geographic Distribution and Quantification of Potential Summer Habitat. In Indian bat: Biology and Management of an Endangered Species. Bat Conservation International. Pages 9-20.

Guyette, R.P., and D.C. Dey. 2000. Humans, topography, and wildland fire: the ingredients for long-term patterns in ecosystems. Pages 28-35 in D.A. Yaussey, editor. Proceedings: workshop on fire, people, and the central hardwoods landscape. USDA Forest Service. General Technical Report NE-274, 12-14 March 2000, Richmond, Kentucky, USA.

Lorimer, C.G. 2001. Historical and ecological role of disturbance in eastern North American forests: 9,000 years of change. Wildlife Society Bulletin 29:425-439.

Missouri Department of Conservation. 1991. Endangered bats and their management in Missouri. Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City. 8 pp

Missouri Department of Conservation. 1986. Management of Old Growth Forests in Missouri. Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Ozark-Saint Francis National Forest. 2001. The role of fire in restoring the forest ecosystem on the Ozark-St. Frances National Forest. Russellville, Arkansas: US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 9pp.

Thompson, F.R., R. Degraaf, and M.K. Trani, 2001. Conservation of woody, early successional habitats, and wildlife in the eastern United States. Wildlife Society Bulletin: 29(2): 407-494.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1975. Endangered, Threatened, and Unique Mammals of the Southern National Forests. U.S. Forest Service, Atlanta, Georgia. 121 pp.

U.S. Department of the Interior. US Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Draft Indiana bat consultation guidance.

U.S. Department of the Interior. US Fish and Wildlife Service. 1999. Biological Opinion on the impacts of Forest Management and Other Activities to the Gray bat, Bald eagle, Indiana bat, and Mead's milkweed on the Mark Twain National Forest.

U.S. Department of the Interior. US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 4, Division of Endangered Species. Endangered and Threatened Species of the Southeastern United States (The Red Book)

U.S. Department of the Interior. US Fish and Wildlife Service. Informal consultation for the Indian bat (June 2004),

USDA Forest Service. Mark Twain National Forest Land & Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). 1986.